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ABSTRACT

Improvement of communication skills for junior college students is a valid goal, but traditional methods defeat it. A sociolinguistic approach maintains the goal but alters the methods, choosing to teach the skills in the context of relevant material: language against the backdrop of society, Teaching language sociolinguistically means including more than grammar; it means studying also its societal framework, its history, its regional and social dialects, its stylistic variations, and its impact on people, institutions, and literature throughout the world. Each facet of sociolinguistic study can be illustrated by literature and reinforced by students' narrative, expository, and descriptive speaking and writing. One might begin with an examination of pidgin and creole languages; or one might look at language change, the study of dialects, style, dictionaries, English as an international language, or the way in which language both mirrors and maps the society it serves. One significant spinoff of teaching language sociolinguistically is the removal or reduction or prejudice against speechways different from the majority's. An annotated bibliography of nine books for the teacher is included. (HOD)

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LANGUAGE IN JUNIOR COLLEGE: A SOCIOLINGUISTIC APPROACH

The junior college is the toughest conundrum and the most challenging theater of operations in higher education today. The rubric junior college is here used as a cover term to include institutions that serve students at grades 13 and 14, and that are variously called vocational or technical institutes, community colleges, or simply colleges. Junior college contrasts neatly with the newer term senior college, applied to institutions that accept only third- and fourth-year, advanced-level college students.

As open-door institutions, junior colleges enroll students of widely varying age, academic qualifications, socioeconomic status, and ethnic background. These students need individualized attention in new programs, developed by teachers who are future-oriented, student-focused, and self-reliant. Junior college students, various as they may be, are united by the dream they have seen: higher education is the gateway to social, economic, and political mobility. The teacher's responsibility is to develop programs that confirm new vistas for them; the teacher's anathema is to repeat the mistakes of their previous education. "Remedial English," by whatever name, is one of those mistakes, since it usually means traditional grammar, a highly abstract study, more appropriate to university students, who have proved their ability to handle abstractions. This ability is probably the shibboleth that distinguishes junior from senior college students.

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There is no denying that many junior college students do need instruction to shore up their skills in writing, reading, speaking, and listening. Improvement is a valid goal, but traditional methods defeat it. A sociolinguistic approach maintains the goal but alters the methods, choosing to teach the skills of communication in the context of intrinsically interesting and relevant material: language against the backdrop of society.

Language is the most important and idiosyncratic aspect of human behavior. Teaching language sociolinguistically means including much more than merely its grammar; it means studying also its societal framework, its history, its regional and social dialects, its stylistic variations, and its impact on peoples, institutions, and literatures throughout the world. Each facet of sociolinguistic study can be illustrated by literature and reinforced by students' narrative, expository, and descriptive speaking and writing.

The word sociolinguistics is obviously a blend of sociology and linguistics. That is, sociolinguistics examines man using language. As a discipline, sociolinguistics seeks to answer two basic questions.

1. Who uses what language or dialect to whom and when and why?
2. What explains the differences in the ways people use language and behave toward it?

The first question concerns what people actually do; the second asks for reasons underlying their behavior. To these questions sociolinguists can offer some tentative, partial answers. When we teach language sociolinguistically we select from sociolinguistic ideas whatever applications are relevant to our students.

A sociolinguistic philosophy of teaching language in junior college means that the teacher is interested in many fields; he aims at being a modern universal man; he strives to know more and more about more and more, rather than more and more about less and less, the hallmark of the traditional Ph.D. He is indeed a generalist, a self-reliant teacher oriented toward the future and focused on students, whether transfer or terminal. If his students move on to a university, they carry with them attitudes essential to open-minded thinking about language. If they end their formal education with a two-year certificate, they leave college with an understanding of the social nature of language, a respect for its varieties and power, and a trust in their own linguistic competence.

Sociolinguistics is intrinsically interesting to both students and teachers. It is fun. The best and most permanent learning takes place when pleasure accompanies it. In a course, where fun is structured into a game frame, with clear rules and rewards, its impact proliferates geometrically. Specifically, then, what might such a course include and what activities would encourage and implement the desired ideas and skills?

A sure-fire beginning is a look at pidgin and creole languages. Pidgin languages develop to meet a communication emergency. Whenever two groups of people, speaking mutually unintelligible languages are forced to communicate, they develop a pidgin language for that purpose. Such a language uses the grammar of one language and the vocabulary of another. For example, Korean Bamboo English developed as a pidgin

language during the Korean conflict when American soldiers faced the problem of communicating with Koreans. The pidgin mixed a vastly simplified grammar of English with words and suffixes borrowed from Korean, Japanese, and English. Here is a brief sample from the story of Cinderella-san. (The Japanese suffix -san marks nouns, and other nouns are formed by the addition of a vowel.)

> Taksan (many) years ago, skoshi (little) Cinderella-san lived in hootchie (house) with sisters, poor little Cinderella-san ketchee no fun, hava-no social life. Always washee-washee, scrubee-scrubee, make chop-chop (food). One day Cinderella-san sisters ketchee post cardo from Seoul. Post cardo speakie so: one prince-san have big blowout, . . . Cindy-san sisters taksan excited, make Cinderella-san police up clothes.
>
> Sisters go black market, ketchee fatigues, new combat boots, bring to hootchie and Cinderella-san cut down fatigues, shine-shine boots. Come night of big shindig, sisters speak sayonara, leave Cindy-san by fire.

So then the fairy godmother appears and sends Cindy-san to the party too, complete with her own polished Corcoran jump boots, and the famous instructions:

> "One thing, kiddee," speak fairy Godmother-san, "knock it off by 2400. I gotta get these clothes back to QM warehouse."

Cinderella-san goes to "ketchee big hit at barn dance," charm number one prince, and lose her Corcoran jumpboot at midnight as she runs to

"hubba hubba home." Eventually, of course, the prince finds her at the home of her sisters, who laugh at the thought that the boot would fit Cindy-san. But Cindy-san knows better.

> Cindy-san grins. She ketchee five aces in this deal, all time know jumpboot fit. Boot slide on skoshi foot with number one fit.
>
> "Kid, you dai jobu (OK)," he speak. "Come on to my house, be number one princess."
>
> "Sayonara, old bags," speak Cindy-san to sisters, and go home with number one price. Taksan happy every after.[1]

The built-in charm of the story is self-evident. In this pleasant context, students can study morphology: how words are made by suffixation, and they can write their own stories in Korean Bamboo English, showing that they understand the principles involved. Coincidentally they learn that all language is structured, a system with its implicit rules. All this and laughter, too, the catalyst of learning.

A creole language is a pidgin grown permanent. A pidgin is nobody's native tongue; a creole is. For example, the West African languages of Blacks taken to Jamaica met English there and a pidgin developed, with African grammar and sounds but with English vocabulary. The next generation of Jamaican Blacks spoke this pidgin as their native and only language; it was then a creole language. Today, Jamaican English has many varieties, ranging from the folk speech of the uneducated poor to the Standard Jamaican English of Kingston. Studying Jamaican English on recordings and in folk tales offers students many

sociolinguistic insights about different varieties of speech as markers of social class. Then their vision can be extended by looking at literature that shows how other languages in contact have mutually influenced each other. Some examples are George Washington Cable's Old Creole Days, which shows the impact of French on English in New Orleans; or the Czech-English of Neighbor Rosicky in Willa Cather's Obscure Destinies; or the various Englishes of Hyman Kaplan's colleagues in Mr. Parkhill's class for teaching English to foreigners, as recounted by Leo Rosten. Such wide-angled views of language reflect the multi-languaged makeup of many junior college audiences. Thus these studies are relevant as well as intellectually respectable and rewarding.

Another interesting area of sociolinguistic language study is the history of English. One key linguistic concept is that language changes constantly, though usually with glacial slowness. Through the centuries, however, these changes accumulate and can be brought vividly home to junior college students, for instance, by a historical study of slang within their own memory; by contrasting books written ten, fifty, and a hundred years ago; by comparing Jesus Christ Superstar with the King James version of the Bible; or by listening to recordings like Our Changing Language,[2] where Beowulf, Chaucer, Shakespeare, and modern British and American English stand in sequence.

The study of dialects is another area of intrinsic interest to students when it is handled sociolinguistically. The study of regional dialects has been commonplace in classrooms since 1963 when Dialects-U.S.A.[3] blazed trail. Dialect surveys have proved instructive--surveys of families, of communities, of schools. Social dialects are

today much more relevant to junior college students than regional ones are. Social dialects can be observed in Black literature like Claude Brown's Manchild in the Promised Land and Warren Miller's The Cool World, for example, as well as in stories of Allapachia by Harriette Arnow, of Florida crackers by Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings, and so forth. Literature always reinforces and supplements a sociolinguistic approach to language study. Literature is studied not only for its own sake, but also for its sociolinguistic relevance.

Style is another sociolinguistic area where language, literature, and composition unite profitably. English presents many stylistic choices to speakers and writers. Junior college students often are unaware of the options available to them. In order to promote their awareness, they can compare different versions of the same piece of literature. For example, John Kuehl's Creative Writing and Rewriting: Contemporary American Novelists at Work[4] contains many contrasting versions of passages from published novels. Or students can examine reports of the same event in different newspapers, or the same event handled in two different kinds of publication, like Stephen Crane's New York Press story of the sinking of the Commodore, which he later used as the basis of his short story "The Open Boat." Then students can create their own stylistically contrasting compositions.

A study of dictionaries is useful in this context if we avoid the traditional boring, repetitious exercises. More rewarding for junior college students is, for example, Wentworth and Flexner's Dictionary of Slang, or a student-made dictionary of slang or of drug language, or a comparison of the same item in several dictionaries.

Such studies introduce students to the variety, processes, and art of lexicography, and help them to see dictionaries as guides, not as gods.

Studying English as an international language opens up other important areas of sociolinguistics. Although English is spoken natively by only about ten percent of the world's population, it serves as a world-wide international language. It is important as a second language in India, Pakistan, Nigeria, Ghana, and the Philippines, for example. In these and other countries it has produced world dialects of English distinctively marked by the contact between English and the mother tongues of these speakers. A wealth of literature by African, Indian, and Filipino writers exists. Much of this literature is intrinsically interesting, but it serves the additional sociolinguistic purpose of presenting foreign cultures to broaden junior college students' international understanding.

Language both mirrors and maps the society it serves. It not only reflects the society's values, problems, and needs, but it also segments its speakers' view of their universe in characteristic ways. For example, because rain is important in our culture, we have many separate words to refer specifically to different kinds of rain: shower, sprinkle, drizzle, mist, precipitation, rainstorm, downpour, deluge, monsoon, typhoon, for example. On the other hand, snow is less important to us. Skiers and snowmobilers may be concerned about different kinds of snow, but to most of us snow is snow. If we wish to specify varieties, we have to add a qualifying word or phrase: falling snow, wet snow, fluffy snow, snow on the ground, snow packed hard like ice, slushy snow, wind-driven snow, and so on.

Nevertheless, even though each language offers its users a special world-view, there are common human drives that unite all people, and these are reflected in language. Apparently, these drives are for life, status, sexual activity, space, time, education, and amusement. Words and actions reveal these drives variously in different cultures. For example, pecking orders are present in all societies. Their reflections in language vary. Japanese has a large vocabulary of honorifics, special forms for addressing those higher in the social scale than onself; in English an army captain speaks differently to a general than to a private. Moreover, in all languages baby talk is different from boy or girl talk, or man and lady talk. So language reflects basic human drives. Such sociolinguistic relationships are interesting and illuminating to students.

One significant spinoff of teaching language sociolinguistically is the removal or reduction of prejudice against speechways different from the majority's. The myth that there is one and only one correct way to say anything bedevils our society in all areas of activity. This single-right-answer myth invites narrow, provincial, and paralyzing attitudes of mind, which prevent us from seeing ourselves in a world context. Since all people have language, its study can be a common meeting ground for human beings no matter what differences separate them. Such self-understanding is the true and highest goal of teaching.

A teacher preparing to teach language sociolinguistically will draw upon all his knowledge of life, language, and literature. To supplement his general knowledge the following annotated bibliography

suggests nine books as a minimal set for the teacher. All these books are quite readable, most are short, none is a massive tome, and most contain bibliographies for further reading and suggestions for class activities.

MINIBIBLIOGRAPHY FOR THE SOCIOLINGUISTIC TEACHING OF LANGUAGE

Fishman, Joshua A. Sociolinguistics: A Brief Introduction. Rowley, Massachusetts: Newbury House Publishers, 1970. Overviewing recent concepts and research techniques in sociology, psychology, and linguistics, Fishman explains large questions of language use at the national and international levels as well as presenting detailed investigations of personal interaction. He ends with a useful chapter on applied sociolinguistics.

Hall, Edward T. The Silent Language. Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1959. With many striking examples, Hall, an anthropologist, analyzes how people communicate without words. Gestures and actions are silent messages that reveal underlying similarities in human drives and differences in their surface manifestations. Easy to read.

Hall, Robert A., Jr. Pidgin and Creole Languages. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1966. Hall surveys the characteristics, origins, and present distribution of the world's major pidgin and creole languages, and explains their linguistic, social, and political significance. He emphasizes their importance for spreading modern civilization in the Carribean, Africa, and the South Pacific. Somewhat technical in parts, which can be skipped.

Labov, William. The Study of Nonstandard English. Urbana, Illinois: National Council of Teachers of English, 1970. Labov presents sociolinguistic principles and attitudes underlying the study of social dialects in the United States. Writing for teachers, he clarifies the educational implications of his studies and conclusions, which are supported by his research in New York's ghettos.

Love, Glen A. and Michael Payne. Contemporary Essays on Style: Rhetoric, Linguistics, and Criticism. Glenview, Illinois: Scott, Foresman and Company, 1969. The essays in this collection are well selected to highlight relationships among rhetoric, linguistics, and criticism, and to define style more concretely than usual. No essay is older than 1951, and all are readable by non-specialists and relevant to understanding modern ways of analyzing literature.

Myers, L. M. The Roots of Modern English. Boston, Massachusetts: Little, Brown and Company, 1966. Myers gives a readable, not highly technical, relatively short presentation of the history of the English language, against its English and American backgrounds. The last two chapters present a useful summary of facts and attitudes about traditional grammar, structural linguistics, and early transformational-generative grammar.

Quirk, Randolph (with supplements by A. C. Gimson and J. Warburg). The Use of English. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1962. All three authors are affiliated with University College, London. The book began as a series of television talks by Quirk for the British Broadcasting Coproration. It reflects Quirk's Survey of English Usage, which yields precise information on the nature, use, and range of

English. Charmingly written, easy to read, and full of excellent exercises and topics for discussion.

Shuy, Roger W. Discovering American Dialects. Urbana, Illinois: National Council of Teachers of English, 1967. This booklet is useful for the study of regional dialects in the United States. However, Shuy does not discuss social dialects. Especially helpful to teachers are the many suggested projects and the sections on the influence of foreign languages on U. S. dialects and on the use of dialect in American literature.

Tyler, Priscilla, ed. Writers the Other Side of the Horizon: A Guide to Developing Literatures of the World. Urbana, Illinois: National Council of Teachers of English, 1964. The essays in this anthology present new literatures emerging in two world contexts: the world community of many languages, and the world community of English. Especially interesting are the literatures written in English as a second language--in Africa, the West Indies, and the Phillipines. These show the creation of world dialects of English.

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FOOTNOTES

[1] This version of the story is based on Grant Webster, "Korean Bamboo English Once More," American Speech, 35 (December 1960), pp. 264-65.

[2] Webster Division, McGraw-Hill Book Company, 23843.

[3] Jean Malmstrom and Annabel Ashley (Urbana, Illinois: National Council of Teachers of English).

[4] New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1967.